

INTRODUCTION: EUROPE AND AMERICA, HISSING COUSINS

THE ATLANTIC GETS EVER WIDER. Not just in a physical sense, as oceans rise and coastlines recede, but also in ideological terms. Europe and America appear to be pitted against each other as never before. On one shore, capitalist markets, untempered by proper social policies, allow unbridled competition, poverty, pollution, violence, class divides, and social anomie. On the other side, Europe nurtures a social approach, a regulated labor market, and elaborate welfare networks. Possibly it has a less dynamic economy, but it is a more solidaristic and harmonious society. “Our social model,” as the voice of British left liberalism, the *Guardian*, describes the European way, “feral capitalism,” in the United States.¹ With the collapse of communism, the European approach has been promoted from being the Third Way to the Second Way. The UK floats ambiguously between these two shores: “Janus Britain” in the phrase of the dean of transatlanticist observers, Timothy Garton Ash.² It is part of

Europe, says the British Left; an Anglo-Saxon coconspirator, answer its continental counterparts.

That major differences separate the United States from Europe is scarcely a new idea. But it has become more menacingly Manichaeic over the last decade. Foreign policy disagreements fuel it: Iraq, Iran, Israel, North Korea. So does the more general question of what role the one remaining superpower should play while it still remains unchallenged. Robert Kagan has famously suggested that, when it comes to foreign policy, Americans and Europeans call different planets home.³ Americans wield hard power and face the nasty choices that follow in its wake. Europeans, sheltered from most geopolitical strife, enjoy the luxury of approaching conflict in a more conciliatory way: Martian unilateralism confronts Venetian multilateralism. But the dispute goes beyond diplomatic and military strategy. It touches on the nature of these two societies. Does having the strongest battalions change the country that possesses them? After all, America is not just militarily strong. It is also—compared to Europe—harsh, dominated by the market, crime-ridden, violent, unsolidaristic, and sharp-elbowed. Competition is an official part of the national ideology and violence the way it spills over into everyday life.⁴ Or so goes the argument: a major battle of worldviews and social practices separates America from Europe.

The idea that the North Atlantic is socioculturally parted is elaborated in both Europe and America for reasons that are as connected to domestic political needs and tactics as they are to any actual differences. American criticism of Europe, when it can be heard at all, typically concerns foreign policy or trade issues. American conservatives occasionally make the old continent a symbol for what they see as the excesses of the welfare state and statutory regulation. But the longstanding European criticism of America has become more vehement and widespread and is now shared by right and left alike. Europeans are keen to define an alternative to American hegemony, now that Europe no longer needs the protection of the United States in a post-cold-war world. Beset with internal fractures and disagreements, they have rediscovered the truism that nothing unites like a common enemy.

In other words, this is not a symmetrical dispute. American anti-Europeanism exists, of course, but it pales next to its European counterpart. “There are no anti-European demonstrations,” as Russell Berman writes, “no burning of French or German flags, no angry mobs with pitchforks and tractors in front of Louis Vuitton boutiques or BMW dealerships. American ‘anti-Europeanism’ is not an equal partner but only an anemic afterthought to the

European spectacles.”⁵ The renaming of french fries in the congressional cafeteria in 2003 (rescinded by 2006) is about as far as things have gone. Even the characterization of the French as cheese-eating surrender monkeys was self-caricature, with *The Simpsons* mocking American troglodytes. Occasionally, a Richard Perle, or his equivalent, gives some Europeans a hard time for disagreeing with the U.S. administration on foreign policy. Policy wonks in DC think tanks may argue the fine points of labor deregulation, extolling alleged American flexibility compared to European sclerosis. But they still breakfast on microwaved simulacra of croissants without considering them emblematic of a larger *Kulturkampf*, and they vacation eagerly in Provence. The battle is rarely joined in reverse. When the talk is about possible gulfs across the Atlantic, one almost never hears about differences whose tendency cuts against European *amour propre*. The Europeans concerned with gun control or the death penalty have few counterparts among American observers pointing out the significant transatlantic difference in terms of the presence (strong and increasing) of neofascist parties in Europe, contrasting to their utter absence in America. Or detailing the well-integrated status of Muslims in the United States, their relegation almost wholly to the social margins across the Atlantic (at least outside Britain).

Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly, and others on the American right attack Europe, just as the European left hangs the United States out to dry. That is no surprise. The contrast comes in the mainstream press. Where *bien pensant* European opinion, as expressed in the *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, or *Der Spiegel*, is heavily colored by certain preconceptions of America, their U.S. counterparts—whether the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, or *Newsweek*—are not analogously inclined. There is no American José Bové, no U.S. equivalent of the European who regards the lowly hamburger as the opening shot of a battle of worldviews that runs the gamut from McDonalds to Monsanto, from globalization to foreign aid, and who can bring the rabble into the street behind him. “The hamburger is a particular source of hatred of America,” readers are assured by Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies. “It is the single most concentrated, or should that be congealed, symbol of the entire complex that is America.”⁶ There is no American version of Harold Pinter or Margaret Drabble, whose anti-Americanism causes her paroxysms of rage and nausea, her prose practically frothing at the mouth.⁷ A vast majority of Americans (91%) desire closer relations with Europe. Only about a third of the French (39%) agree, barely more than half the British (51%), though the Germans (74%) and the Spanish (67%) are more friendly.⁸

Working-class Americans are largely unconcerned with Europe, while working-class Europeans are often quite fond of the United States. They swarm Florida's beaches and enjoy visiting a country that—less strictly governed by the *Bildungsbürgertum*—unashamedly caters to popular taste. The main contrasts come higher up the social scale. University-educated Americans are, on the whole, positively inclined toward Europe. If anything, they are deferential. Think only of the cultural cringe of U.S. academics. Yes, American right-wing intellectuals occasionally attack Europe. Yet they do so not to play to their own foot soldiers, who could not care less, but to goad the American liberal elite. Anti-Europeanism is part of the battle between right and left. In contrast, both the European left and right alike are anti-American. Each has its own reasons, whether it is the vulgarism of cultureless populism for the Right or the exploitativeness of untrammelled markets for the Left. But they are united in their dislike, and thus reassured that they have at least a European identity in common. In America, anti-European sentiments divide; in Europe, anti-American opinions unite.

One of the aspects of European criticism of the United States that puzzles Americans is how selective or even ill-informed it often is. It is a venerable tradition for Europeans to portray America without knowing much about it. Karl May was an overwhelmingly popular German author of cowboy (Old Shatterhand) and Indian (Winnetou) stories, loved by everyone from Einstein to Hitler. Travel was difficult in his day. One can perhaps forgive him for spinning his fantasies of the Wild West before ever setting foot in America in 1908, and even then, never further inland than Buffalo in upstate New York, which—despite its name—was certainly not the West of which he wrote. But when an internationally successful film director, Lars von Trier, makes a series of movies (*Dancer in the Dark*, *Dogville*, *Manderlay*) set in and critical of the United States without having ever been there, one begins to suspect something akin to willful ignorance. Not that mere knowledge has ever been a prerequisite for opinions on America. "I did not need to go to the United States to say what I said," Georges Duhamel, a French writer, assured his readers in 1930. "I could have written most of the chapters of my book without leaving Paris."⁹ Reading Europe's popular press pundits, Americans often grope to recognize their country: rapster ghetto chic, laced with urban poverty or trailer park Appalachia, contrasted with gated-community golf links, iced with caloric surfeit and seasoned with prison brutality. The sociological earnestness of it all is interrupted now and then by some head-shaking Vegas weirdness for comic relief.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

WORKING WITH INTERNET SOURCES is to enter a Borgesian universe of ever-shifting reality. A URL that works one day delivers you to a blank screen the next, or—almost more frustrating—to a new version of the Web site that you had earlier worked with for hours without problem, but which now, its administrators cheerily announce, is new and improved and therefore—from your point of view—unnavigable, at least without starting from scratch.

The usual conventions of scholarly footnoting, which presume a stable referent, are largely undone. I have attempted to be as precise about where I have found data as I could without turning this book into a vast mass of footnotes preceded by a smidgen of text. Often I have supplied URLs. They may work. Some URLs are so long and complicated that you are unlikely to transfer them accurately from these pages to your browser. That frustration will then be compounded when—even when correctly transcribed—the Web site they lead to turns out to have changed in the meantime. In such cases, you are better off following the instructions I also supply on how to find the information, detailed below. Or you may find it easier simply to Google the name or description of the document in question.

Some Web sites have ever-changing URLs, depending on how they are accessed. Source-OECD is one such. Some Web sites are freely accessible from anywhere. Some require a subscription that is often available to those who have institutional affiliations with major research universities, but which can also often be gotten at through terminals at public libraries. Some require various formalities of registration. And some, but almost none used here, require money to be paid for access.

Some Web sites are ones that must be navigated once you are in. In those and similar cases, I have tried to supply a thread to follow. Thus, for example, a reference such as “Eurostat. Statistics, Regions and Cities, Main Tables, Regional Statistics, Regional Economic Accounts—ESA95, Disposable Income of Private Households” means that, from the Eurostat home page, you should click on the subsequent links indicated and will—with luck—eventually make it to the table that gives Disposable Income of Private Households.

The information used here was consulted mainly in 2008. It may well have changed several times in the interim. I have foresworn the usual pseudo-scholarly piety of indicating in each case the precise date on which I last consulted an Internet source. That would be merely

another bit of information you would have to take on faith, and what is the point of knowing when the URL worked if it no longer does? I have thought it more useful to supply explanations of how to find the information, as mentioned above.

OECD materials are, except in the few cases otherwise noted, available through SourceOECD.

ABBREVIATIONS

CDACS: Center for Democracy and Civil Society, Georgetown University,

IARC: International Agency for Research on Cancer

ISSP: International Social Survey Programme. From the GESIS—Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften Web page (<http://zacat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp>), select ISSP, By Module Topic, then topic and study. Having chosen the study, click Variable Description, Archive and ID variables, click on the Table tab, select Country, select Add to column, enter your ID and password. Select Substantial Variables, select variable in question, select Add to row.

WDI Online: World Bank, World Development Indicators Online

WHOSIS: World Health Organization, Statistical Information System

WRI: World Resources Institute

WVS: World Values Survey. There are two sets of WVS surveys, the Four Wave Aggregate and the 2005 survey. If not otherwise noted, the data comes from the most recent results of the Four Wave surveys, which for our countries means from between 1996 and 2001. When data comes from the 2005 Wave that is noted as WVS 2005. Available at: <http://www.worldvalues-survey.com/>

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". . . this is a rich source of comparative data, to be thoroughly recommended to anyone who loves league tables, who wants to compare their country's performance with that of others, or to appreciate the sheer variety of social practices."—**MICHAEL MANN, *NEW LEFT REVIEW***

"The contention of Peter Baldwin is that all of the difference-mongering about the United States and Europe is wildly overblown that, in fact, across a panoply of quantifiable social characteristics and policy outcomes, the United States generally falls not outside the European range, but squarely within it. In 212 charts, 60 pages of footnotes, and a crackling prose style refreshingly at odds with the statistical material under consideration, he proves the case beyond a reasonable doubt."—**TOD LINDBERG, *THE WEEKLY STANDARD***

There is much heated rhetoric about the widening gulf between Europe and America. But are they so different? Peter Baldwin thinks not, and in this bracing and remarkably informed polemic, he lays out how similar the two regions really are. Drawing on the latest evidence from sources such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the IMF, Baldwin offers a fascinating comparison of the United States and Europe, looking at the latest statistics on the economy, crime, health care, education, religion, the environment, and much more. It is a book filled with surprising revelations. For most categories of crime, for instance, America is safe by European standards. But the biggest surprise is that, though there are many differences between America and Europe, in almost all cases, the gaps are no greater than the differences among European nations. Europe and the US are, in fact, part of a common, big-tent grouping. America is not Sweden, for sure. But nor is Italy Sweden, nor France, nor even Germany. And who says that Sweden is Europe? Any more than Vermont is America?

PETER BALDWIN is Professor of History at UCLA. He is the author of *Disease and Democracy*, *Contagion and the State in Europe, 1830-1930*, and *The Politics of Social Solidarity*.

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